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ABSTRACT

The exploitation of adjunct faculty is a disgrace to the academy. The prominence and indispensability of part-time faculty is obvious, yet they are rarely acknowledged or compensated for their mandatory contributions to higher education. This paper seeks to explicate how adjunct faculty are at risk and disempowered by a lack of respect (disconfirmation) from their own departments, by "institutional neglect," and by a lack of representation. The paper relates one educator's personal experiences as an adjunct faculty member in communication. She received no support at all, even minimal secretarial support, and felt completely alienated from her departmental colleagues and staff. The educator felt that her students were disadvantaged because of the lack of departmental identity and support for her. The paper lists some suggestions that administrators should consider which would improve the lot of adjunct faculty, and which would, additionally, assist in developing a stronger educational foundation for institutions. Contains 27 references. (NKA)

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The Invisible Professor At-Risk:
How Departmental Disconfirmation Disempower Adjunct Faculty

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Now, more than ever in the history of higher education, adjunct faculty are essential to the operation of academic programs. Part-time faculty are more often "the rule, rather than the exception" (Haeger, 1998, p. 81). The overwhelming numbers of adjuncts needed to staff increasing enrollments, especially in community colleges, confirm that fact. "Literature indicates that in community colleges nationwide, part-time faculty members outnumber full-time faculty" and the numbers have risen consistently for almost 30 years (Burgess, & Samuels, 1999, p. 495). Adjunct faculty were originally hired in the late 1960s to compensate for inflated enrollments on campuses as baby-boomers sought college degrees. By the 1970s, "academe suffered a Ph.D. glut as enrollments leveled off while universities continued to churn out fledgling professors faster than the shrinking job market could absorb them" (Bowen, 1987, p. 65). Lee (1997), found that between 1973 and 1991 there had been a 205.4% increase in the number of part-time faculty at community colleges alone. As of September 1, 2000, one of the largest community college districts in the nation, the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) in Arizona, employed 4,861 adjunct faculty and 1,091 full time faculty to teach on twelve campuses, a ratio of over 4-1 adjuncts to full time faculty. Regardless of the indisputable need for adjunct faculty, minimum-wage salaries, a lack of benefits, and exclusion from the collegial organizational culture perpetuate cultural and institutional disrespect for part-time professors. Lords (1999) relays "the treatment of part-time faculty is the dirty little secret of higher education" (p. A16).

"In most institutions, ...part-time faculty are marginalized" (Wyles, 1998, p. 90). Most are hired just days prior to the beginning of each semester, and have no departmental support to help them prepare for classes. Part-time faculty "conditions of employment" in the Maricopa District include "no tenure or job security, instant non-renewal at the discretion of Department Chairs (lack of due process), generally inadequate or nonexistent office space and facilities, and no remuneration for the time spent on student mentoring and counseling" (Burgess & Samuels, 1999, p. 497). "Absence of offices, telephones, support staff, and equipment" are consistent nationwide with the majority of departmental limitations (Haeger, 1998, p. 84). These conditions communicate departmental exclusion by denying these integral members of our learning communities the same tools that are afforded to full time faculty. Wyles,

(1998) identifies that we have created "a climate of job insecurity, vulnerability, and marginalization" for the exploitation of professional faculty.

The exploitation of adjunct faculty is a disgrace to the academy. Even more disgraceful are adjunct salaries that generally range between $1,000 and $3,000 per course. "College teaching for many has become the lowest-paying legal job in America" (Nelson, 1999, p. 30). Colleges take advantage of underemployed academics by offering woefully inadequate adjunct salaries. Many adjuncts must travel daily, teaching on two or more campuses in order to acquire enough courses to provide a minimum income on which to live (Boileau, 1997, p. 8). It comes as no surprise that a 1998 study conducted in Virginia by the State Council of Higher Education found evidence of "low morale and perceived exploitation" among adjunct faculty (Intress, 1998, p. A-1). The prominence and indispensability of part-time faculty is obvious, yet they are rarely acknowledged or compensated for their mandatory contributions to higher education.

The purpose of this essay is to explicate how adjunct faculty are at-risk and disempowered by a lack of respect (disconfirmation) from their own departments, by "institutional neglect," and by a lack of representation (Wyles, 1999).

Literature Review

Volumes of literature exist regarding the hiring of adjunct faculty in higher education. Considerable research relates specifically to financial incentives for institutions that hire adjunct faculty as "an economic device" (Ames, 1997, p. 1). Part-time professors earn anywhere "from a third to a half of what their tenured colleagues make" (Fulton, 2000, p. 38). Typical salaries for part-time professors teaching a comparable course load to full time professors average between $20,000-$25,000 annually, saving universities and colleges millions (Statesman-Journal, 2000). Lords (1999) concurs that in Washington state, "paying part-timers salaries and benefits proportional to those of full-timers would cost the system $63 million a year" (p. A16).

Boileau (1997) justifies an administrator's hiring perspective by using the term "cash cow" to refer to adjunct faculty. The "cash cow" reference relates to the instructional cost per course saved by George Mason University when hiring adjunct instructors, instead of full time instructors. Over seventy percent of communication classes are taught by part-time faculty at GMU (Boileau, 1997, p.1). Each semester, the university saves the communication department between $30,000 and $90,000 by hiring adjunct faculty. Given the financial realities in higher education, one can understand

why administrators and state legislators continue to exploit part-time professors. Further savings for the state or institution result from a lack of benefits offered to adjunct faculty. Ames (1997) states that "benefits are not normally extended to adjunct faculty, and as such the savings are immense" (p. 1). Most receive "no health insurance, no retirement plan, no office space, and no guarantee of a job next semester" (Nelson, 1999, p. 30).

Further institutional benefits, derived from hiring adjunct faculty, relate to budget constraints and flexibility. Adjunct faculty "can be dropped from the payroll at the stroke of a vice presidential pen" due to the practice of hiring adjuncts on a semester to semester basis (Walker, 1998, p. B6). This option provides great flexibility for departments and colleges when budgets must be reduced, or tenure lines converted. Haeger, (1998) warns that "once begun, the strategy of reducing tenure-track lines to provide budget flexibility" tends to develop a momentum of its own (p. 83). When this occurs, part-time faculty hiring increases to replace tenure-track positions.

Overall funding in higher education has steadily diminished over the past 10-15 years. Administrators with tight budgets realize that a percentage of funds released from tenure lines can "be applied to equipment purchases or departmental operating funds" (Haeger, 1998, p. 83). "Institutions can save 60-75 percent on faculty costs" by hiring part-time faculty (Hickman, 1998, p. 14). For administrators, converting part-time positions into full time faculty hires and salaries seem to be of least priority. A case in point is one campus where a "$50 million, 185-room dormitory in the style of luxury condominiums with kitchens and private bathrooms" was planned, although the administration believed that increasing the number of full time faculty would be cost-prohibitive (Hickman, 1998, p. 14). Obviously, this exemplifies administrative priorities. Hiring large numbers of part-time faculty is advantageous for academic administrators in ways not so readily apparent. When there is a reduction of faculty contributing to the shared governance of the institution, there is greater administrative control (Haeger, 1998).

Further research focuses on concerns about hiring disproportionate numbers of adjunct faculty on campuses nationwide. Several reports state that one-third to two-thirds of college classrooms are now staffed by part-time professors (Jaschik, 1993; Mydans, 1995; Hickman, 1998; Nelson, 1999). Proportionally, America's two-year colleges hire the greatest numbers of adjunct faculty (Schontzler, 1999).

One example is Rio Salado Community College in Arizona that currently employs over 600 adjunct faculty and twenty full time faculty, an excessive imbalance. Problematic in these disproportionate numbers are the logistics of maintaining effective instructional programs. Access to Rio's adjunct faculty cannot be obtained through the college's WebPage. In fact, none of the over 600 adjuncts are even listed as faculty on the WebPage. And yet, a portion of the college description reads "above all, Rio Salado provides a caring and supportive environment, where employees and students form a diverse community" (Rio Salado web page). With the apparent physical and social isolation that part-time faculty face, how might they benefit from, or participate in, a caring and supportive environment? When a majority of part-time faculty have no offices for students to visit, telephones, or mailboxes in which students can leave messages, communication with faculty is severely limited and pedagogical effectiveness is likely to be affected. Haeger, (1998) reminds us that "large numbers of part-time faculty who are paid less and have a nearly invisible role in the departments disrupts the departmental culture of teaching and research" (p. 86). How can part-time faculty, whose offices tend to be boxed in their car trunks, adequately assist, and be accessible to students? Should adjuncts have to provide their home telephone numbers to students, perpetually being on-call? Students and part-time professors deserve better.

Additionally, most institutions lack policies to ensure adjuncts' integration into the academic culture, as well as opportunities for casual, social exchanges, or collegial interaction (Haeger, 1998).

A brief review of additional literature reveals growing concerns over crisis in the classroom, because some adjunct faculty may lack adequate instructional evaluation, certification, or training provided by their institutions (Miller, R. et al., 2000; Carreiro, J. et al., 1999; Petrisko, M., 1999). Missing from the available extant literature, however, is significant research regarding adjunct professors' perspectives.

Disempowerment and Disconfirmation

As a new adjunct faculty member, four years ago, I was grateful to be hired for a teaching position. I was hired by a department chair four days prior to the beginning of the semester, and was informed of an adjunct faculty meeting the following evening. I went to the meeting, with many questions regarding what texts the courses required, class size, rosters, copying availability, office support, etc. The chair referred my questions to another faculty member who was the "evening supervisor" for adjunct

faculty. The chair mentioned I need not call him again for information, but rather, I should call the evening supervisor.

I was also introduced to the department secretary, and was told not to bother her or to list the department phone number on my syllabus. The secretary could not be bothered to take messages from my students. Not only had I immediately been disconfirmed by the department from the implication that my interactions with the secretary would be a disruption, I felt my students were also disadvantaged because of my lack of departmental identity and support. My evening students failed to receive the same conveniences as the day students because I was an adjunct professor. I felt I had failed my students before the semester had even begun. I also felt lost and abandoned by my department, as if I were merely filling a void, rather than valued for my knowledge and experience.

Mirman, Swartz, and Barell (1988) indicate that "having both knowledge itself and a climate in which that knowledge is used and valued is necessary to empower teachers and students" (p. 146). Clearly, there was no attempt on the part of the department to ensure my success by providing collegial support, or inclusion in the college organizational culture. I was amazed at the overt alienation from departmental colleagues and staff. On one occasion, I visited the full timers' offices prior to attending a communication conference. I inquired whether there were any papers they would be interested in my obtaining for them since none of them planned to attend. They looked at me with disdain, as they shook their heads, indicating "No". I was marginalized in a departmental culture in which my knowledge and interests were neither valued nor respected by colleagues. I was afforded minimal opportunity to voice concerns or to interact with full time faculty, although initiated by me.

Disempowerment is characterized by lack of control over one's own life or circumstances. Robinson (1994) suggests that:

> empowerment is marked by respect for each individual in the group based not on a position of authority or the skills of each individual but on the sense that each person has a valuable contribution to make, each has a unique voice that echoes the unique experiences of the individual (p. 159)

Disempowerment, then, is to be void of, or lacking an opportunity to voice experiences. I was not invited to faculty meetings, or any alternative venue, to share information, student concerns, or to contribute ideas or suggestions. After being on

campus for two years, I expressed interest in attending faculty meetings and was met with looks of disbelief. I was told I could attend, but that it would be best if I remained silent. My experiences were not unique to part-time professors. Many adjunct faculty experience disconnection from the community of learners, and alienation from academic decision making, and from the collegial process (Wyles, 1998).

My first course assignments were evening classes, which would not have been my choice. Arriving on campus at night, I was prevented from parking in a lighted, faculty parking lot by a gated entry. The lot was reserved for full time faculty, although the lot remained empty, except for a few college vans, every night that I taught.

I was virtually invisible on campus, except to my students. I had no office in which to meet students, prepare for class, or gather my thoughts. I arrived, I taught class, and I left campus. If problems arose with students, I had no one to whom I could refer students, or to ask questions if I needed answers. Full time faculty and administrators were absent from campus after 7:00 p.m., when my classes began.

For several semesters, I taught seven or eight courses on two campuses. When students asked to meet with me, I arranged to meet them individually. Most times, it was inconvenient for me and often a 30-minute drive each way. Due to students' schedules, they invariably needed to meet evenings or days I was not scheduled to be on campus. On many occasions, I met students at their job, at a café near campus, or spoke with students on campus while sitting on a bench, or outside a classroom. These were frequently awkward meetings, since many times students revealed personal matters to me in a very public space. I felt being accessible to students was a part of my obligations to them, however risky given the disclosive context. Many adjuncts have shared similar examples of commitment to students, that I believe, serves to dispel the myth that part-time faculty are less committed, or less effective than their full time cohorts (Wyles, 1998).

Likewise, adjuncts find negotiation of self in the classroom, and authority with students continually suppressed. An example of this occurred when I dismissed students early from a 3-hour evening course. I received a message at home the following day from the chair to contact my evening supervisor immediately. I contacted the supervisor and was reprimanded for dismissing students early. I explained that students completed their speeches, discussion, and self-evaluations, so I rewarded them by dismissing them early. The supervisor explained to me that should

the department hear of this action again, without my receiving permission from the department, I would not be rehired for the following semester. I was given the responsibility to teach, without benefit of authority (Wyles, 1998).

Like many adjuncts, I had the credentials, without the authority to make decisions concerning my own classroom management. As many students are considered at-risk of failure, due to circumstances beyond their control, I believe many part-time faculty are at-risk of not succeeding due to their control being usurped. On two separate occasions, I arrived on the first day of class, prepared to distribute my syllabus, calendar, and course materials only to discover that my students' textbooks were different than mine. My department had failed to inform me that they changed the text. Due to a departmental oversight, I began the semester lacking credibility with my students, again placing me at-risk. Part-time professors are expected to " serve with loyalty and dedication without enjoying reciprocal trust and professional respect" from their departments or institutions (Wyles, 1998, p. 90).

During the past four years, I have documented experiences of disconfirmation that other adjunct faculty have disclosed to me, which have manifested in many ways. Included in these are low salaries; limited number of courses available per semester; last minute appointments; lack of guaranteed appointment for future semesters; no access to office, phones, or clerical support; lack of benefits; no compensation for additional duties; avoidance techniques demonstrated by full time faculty; exclusion from faculty meetings, social gatherings, and collegial interactions on campus; refused copy code (to copy one's own materials); and lack of monetary compensation for additional degrees or years of experience. While separately these may not seem like major concerns, however, most part-time faculty experience all or most of these on a constant basis. Continual lack of departmental respect, academic freedom, efficacy, affirmation, and inclusion results in less than effective employees (MacMillan, 1999). Students experiencing similar conditions would most certainly be labeled at-risk of failure.

Moral Dilemma

Wyles (1998) concludes that

> "the overarching problem is not the growing number or the overall proportion of adjunct faculty; rather, it is the institutional neglect of this critical mass—not so much their neglect as their exclusion from the teaching-learning enterprise" (p. 92).

Sadly, invalidating terms have increasingly become synonymous with the identity of *part-time*, or *adjunct faculty*. Pejorative labels found in the literature to describe adjunct faculty in higher education include "subfaculty" (Langenberg, 1998), "freeway faculty" (Statesman-Journal, 2000), "academic gypsies" (Bowen, 1987, p.65), "cheap labor" (Intress, 1998, p. A-1), "second-class citizens, throw-away workers," (Schontzler, 1999), "migrant workers of the education industry" (Nelson, 1999, p. 30), and finally, "a necessary evil" or "part-time people" (Ames, 1997). These stereotypical labels illustrate demeaning attitudes about colleagues who have been educated as professionals by the same institutions that classify them as a "lesser species" (Langenberg, 1998, p. 39). As communication scholars, we have witnessed the damage that such attitudes can cause.

"We cannot afford to marginalize such an important part of our faculty" (Wyles, 1998, p. 92). Administrators in higher education must not continue to exploit this "faculty of convenience" derived from increasing enrollments that perpetuate the business of education (Wyles, 1998, p. 92). Some suggestions worth consideration are:

- Improving communication between the institution and adjunct faculty. This might be accomplished by creating a permanent, full time, liaison position (or office) on each campus to ensure that all incoming adjunct faculty are aware of campus policies, restrictions, and available support services.
- Providing opportunities for campus and departmental involvement. This might be accomplished by inviting participation in campus orientations, faculty meetings, college committees, and community service.
- Inviting adjuncts with specified areas of expertise to share their training and skills in workshops and seminars.
- Providing opportunities for adjunct faculty to share research and pedagogical strategies with one another and with their full time cohorts. This may be accomplished through a faculty newsletter, monthly social activities, or professional growth opportunities.
- Implementing adjunct faculty mentoring programs by full time faculty. For the adjunct's first year on campus, full time faculty could be available to answer questions, provide guidance, and orient them to the institutional culture.

- Consistent evaluations of part-time faculty relevant to academic responsibilities. This need not fall on the overburdened shoulders of department chairs or administrators. Experienced teachers in the discipline dedicated to student-centered, innovative teaching methodologies might be compensated with a reduced teaching load to systematically evaluate adjuncts' teaching.

And in an ideal world,

- Working with state legislators and administrators to provide commensurate pay and equitable (not necessarily equal) benefits for part-time faculty. To initiate this we might consider replacing the "letters of appointment" with legitimate contracts, which would validate years of experience when/if full time positions are offered.

"There are no easy answers to academia's over-dependence on part-time faculty" (Hickman, 1998, p. 16). The suggestions offered could benefit, not only part-time faculty, but assist in developing a stronger educational foundation for institutions. Adjunct faculty will continue to be necessary on our campuses. Disconfirming them may create a temporary veil of invisibility, but they deserve the respect and dignity that higher education promised them.

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